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ABSTRACT

Uses and gratifications research involves a critical appraisal of conceptual and theoretical issues in mass communication and is concerned with what audience members do with the media. Activation theory understands people as active manipulators of their environment. (Activation refers to that level of psychological and physiological excitement an individual habitually seeks. This level fluctuates during the day in a predictable pattern.) The two perspectives appear to be complementary in that both understand that people seek stimulus from the environment. Activation theory helps overcome the criticism that uses and gratifications research does not stipulate why people use the media by noting that the media are a part of the environment providing a variety in activities, information to help in understanding the world and self, and activities of various intensities. Since, as activation theory holds, one seeks to maintain an activation level within the customary level, the media provide activities to allow the lowering of a level that has become too high and the increase of a level that is too low. Instead of simply reacting to media content or of being manipulated by that content, activation theory and uses and gratifications research maintain that people use the media to meet their own needs. Uses and gratifications research in the future would be strengthened by some consideration of activation as the source of media usage. (FL)

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ACTIVATION THEORY AND USES AND GRATIFICATIONS RESEARCH

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ACTIVATION THEORY AND USES AND GRATIFICATIONS RESEARCH

Mass communication theorists have focused their attention for many years upon a linear effects model of communication. Harold Lasswell's description of the mass communication process as: *Who says what to whom with what effect?* was one of the earliest of many "hypodermic theories" of mass communication (Martin, 1976). Lasswell's model, at least implicitly, suggests that communication through the mass media is something which someone does to someone else.

Lasswell's model guided the research on propaganda in the 1930's(Doob, 1935). Undoubtedly influenced by the work and philosophy of Goebells in Germany, these researchers analyzed the tricks, or mechanisms, which the propagandist used to influence a passive audience. They studied the structure of the various media to show "how the means of exerting influence were coming progressivley into the hands of a smaller and smaller cligue of rich men who used them to maintain the existing social order"(Bauer, 1973,3).

This model also guided the research of Carl Hovland at Yale University (Hovland, et. al., 1953). Hovland manipulated the variables which affect persuasion in an attempt to understand how the source of the message could affect attitude change in the mind of the receiver. Thus variables related to the communicator (who), e.g., credibility, were varied in an attempt to discover their influence upon the reception of the message. Other variables concerning the types of messages, e.g., fear appeals, language intensity, one or two sidedness, etc., (what) were manipulated to study the effects of different types of appeals upon attitude change. Receiver variables (whom), e.g., passive versus active encoding, were also manipulated to

maximize the amount of attitude change(with what effect). This model still dominates persuasion research although some recent articles have attempted to overcome its linearity by proposing a more complex theory of persuasion (see Simons, 1976; Miller and Burgoon, 1978).

This linear effects model, or one of the many based upon it, guided the movie research conducted by Blumer (1933) and Blumer and Houser (1933). This research attempted to assess the effect of motion picture content upon the behavior of juveniles who attended the movies. It was assumed that movie viewing had an effect upon behavior. No attempt was made to investigate the possibility that juveniles with certain behavior patterns might seek out movies of a certain type.

The best known use of the effects model in mass communication research today is the work of George Gerbner at the Annernberg School of Communication, University of Pennsylvania. While the content analysis of television done by Gerbner and his associates dates back to 1967-1968, the audience surveys concerning viewer effects did not begin until 1973. This extension of Gerbner's research came about as the conceptual framework of the research broadened to take into account policy decisions which might be made concerning television in light of social scientific investigations.

Underlying these policy and research decisions are a large number of assumptions about television and its audience. Gerbner understands television as the "central cultural arm of American society"(Gerbner & Gross, 1976). It serves a cultural function by socializing people into stable social patterns. Television serves to build resistance to change. It is a medium of socialization which gives people "standardized roles and bebehaviors."

Gerbner asserts that television is used non-selectively. Viewers are passive. They watch whatever is on without consideration of program type, content, or individual preferences.

> With the exception of national events and some "specials" the total viewing audience is fairly stable regardless what is on. Individual tasts and program preferences are less important in determining viewing patterns than is the time a program is on. The nearly universal, non-selective, and habitual use of television fits the ritualistic pattern in its programming. You watch television as you might attend a church service except that most people watch television more religiously(Gerbner and Gross, 1976,177).

Gerbner and Gross report a direct relationship between the amount of time spent watching television and a *fortress mentality* or mean world syndrome, as it has also been called. Heavy viewers of television are more likely to overestimate the amount of crime, danger in their neighborhood, the number of persons doing policework, and to distrust other people. They have a sense of fear about daily life. The world is dangerous, they believe, it is going to the dogs, and government must step in to correct this danger.

It should be noted that Canadian mass communication research has not found this effect among Canadians who view television a great deal of the time. Doob and MacDonald (1976) found that among Toronto viewers, persons who lived in high crime neighborhoods did possess a mean world syndrome while those living in low crime neighborhoods did not possess this belief system. The amount of time spent viewing television was not significantly different between people living in the different neighborhoods. Tate (1976) also failed to find a link between the amount of time spent watching television and a mean world syndrome. He did find that persons with authoritarian belief systems agreed with this syndrome and reported finding messages of fear in the television programs which they viewed. It appears that at least for Canadians, as well as British television viewers (Wober, 1978), the so called mean world syndrom is more complex and related to other social

variables than that reported by Gerbner and Gross from research in the United States.

In recent years communication scholars have begun to turn their attention to a different model of mass communication than the traditional linear effects model. Uses and gratifications research (Blumler and Katz, 1974; McQuail, Blumler and Brown, 1972) developed in Europe and Israel. As David Swanson (1979) has pointed out this perspective involves a lively critical appraisal of conceptual and theoretical issues in mass communication. "Uses and gratifications researchers' commitment to addressing conceptual issues may thus be read, without overstating the case too strongly, as one sign of the field's intellectual maturation"(Swanson, 1979, 3).

The uses and gratifications viewpoint—model, program, one hesitates in light of Swanson's comments to call it a theory—represents a dramatic break with past theoretical endeavors in mass communication. First, it is not borrowed from another discipline as were the traditional theories. It does have roots in structual functionalism but theorists such as Blumler (1979) are seeking to move it away from these roots. It may also be closely akin to theoretical formulations in the sociology of knowledge and symbolic interactionism(Katz, 1979). However at the present time it is struggling to free itself from the functionalism which Swanson has criticized as being insufficient for mass communication research(Swanson, 1976, 1977).

More importantly however, uses and gratifications research asks a totally different question about the media than did the traditional approach. The traditional approach, described above, asked the basic question, "What do the mass-media do to people?"(Katz, 1959, 2). Uses and gratifications researchers ask the question, "What do audience members do with media?"

Basic to the uses and gratifications perspective is the concept of an active audience. This model of mass media usage conceives of the audience as actively seeking to fulfill goals through media usage(McQuail, Blumler and Brown, 1972). Media usage is conceived of as being purposeful activity and not simply "pastime," diversion, sport, or non-need oriented activity. Contrary to the assumptions of Gerbner and Gross (1976) and Bogart(1965) who argue that media activity is essentially casual, this model recognizes that audience members have expectations of what different types of media can offer them. These theorists do recognize that much media activity originates as casual activity. However they argue that patterns of media use "are shaped by more or less definite expectations of what certain kinds of content have to offer the audience member"(Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch, 1974, 21).

Since it is the audience member who takes the initiative in seeking out media content which will fulfill the gratification sought, this perspective limits any linear effects model of media influence upon viewers attitudes and behavior. People use the media, according to this perspective, as Schramm, Lyle and Parker argued in their study of television and children.

> In a sense the term "effect" is misleading because it suggests that television "does something" to children....Nothing can be further from the fact. It is the children who are most active in this relationship. It is they who use television rather than television that uses them (Schramm, Lyle, and Parker, 1961).

Uses and gratifications researchers also recognize that all activities people take part in compete with the media as sources of need satisfaction (Lundberg and Hulten, 1974; Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch, 1974). There are a broad range of human needs and a broad range of sources of gratification. Similarly some needs may not be fulfilled through media consumption. Jogging and running fulfill needs within the individual which that individual cannot find gratification for by watching television or reading a book.

Basic to the uses and gratifications research methodology is the assumption that "people are sufficiently self-aware to be able to report their own interests and motives in particular cases, or at least to recognize them when confronted with them in an intelligible and familiar verbal forumlation"(Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch, 1974, 22). Becker (1979) has expanded upon the methodological assumptions of uses and gratifications research by showing the methodological problems concerned with this research. He also demonstrates that when given an opportunity to report their motives for watching political advertising on television viewers are able to list those gratifications which the theory suggests they are seeking. In other words, they responded that they were seeking information upon which to make a decision. when voting or to understand a governmental policy. Katz (1979) suggests that those gratifications which were not named in open ended questioning but surfaced in lists of gratifications given by the researcher are more latent gratifications.

> Perhaps the other items—excitement, reinforcement, communication—are the latent functions of political communication for the political system in the sense that they trigger interpersonal and intrapersonal mechanisms which make for active participation rather than just rational calculation or detached observation(Katz, 1979, 79).

Futhermore, Becker finds that the list of gratifications set out by Blumler and McQuail (1969) is exhaustive as far as the uses of political communication goes. Voters use political communication for vote guidance, surveillance, and reinforcement. Users of political communication may also seek excitement from the media content and Becker, as well as Blumler and McQuail (1969), delineate a clear avoidance factor. Political communication may be avoided because the viewer wants to relax, is alienated, knows the media is biased, or has already made up his or her mind as to how they are going to vote.

Finally, uses and gratifications researchers argue that one should suspend judgments about the social significance of the mass media and mass communication until the data about audience orientations are collected and understood. Critics of the mass media are constantly making value judgments about the cultural and social effects of the media. Like the critics who attack "popular culture" these judgments are elitist, or at least tend to be elitist. They are based upon specific value systems which are not shared by the members of the audience. The study of uses and gratifications seeks to discover the value systems of those who use the media in order to ascertain which values the media fulfill. In this respect, those who uphold the uses and gratifications perspective believe that the social critic places the proverbial "cart before the horse" (see especially Rosenberg and White, 1971).

> In other words, our position is that media researchers ought to be studying human needs to discover how much the media do or do not contribute to their creation and satisfaction. Moreover, we believe that it is our job to clarify the extent to which certain kinds of media and content favor certain kinds of use—to thereby set boundaries on the over-generalization that any kind of content can be bent to any kind of need. We believe it is our job to explore the social and individual conditions under which audiences find need or use for program material aimed at changing their image of the status-quo or "broadening their cultural horizons."

The most vocal critic of uses and gratifications research has been David Swanson at the University of Illinois (Swanson, 1976, 1977, 1979). Swanson has based his attack upon the weaknesses of functional theory, the failure by uses and gratifications researchers to specify precise meanings for concepts which have been developed, and a failure to take seriously the concept of an active audience. This latter criticism is the most important certainly as it strikes at the heart of uses and gratifications theory.

> It is both surprising and puzzling to realize that the uses and gratifications program has not sought explicitly to investigate how persons perceive and interpret the content of messages and whether those interpretations do indeed provide the expected link between needs, uses, and gratifications. The typical uses and gratifications research design investigates nearly every stage in the process—need, goal or expectation, media exposure, consequence of exposure—except the perceptual activity of interpreting or creating meaning for messages.
>
> By failing to inquire into interpretative processes and the meanings they yield, uses and gratifications researchers are leaving unexplored the presumed link which ties together their vision of the mass communication process. Additionally, they may be denying the ostensible fundamental assumption of their position and returning to the view of meaning as given in content to passive receivers which informed the effects tradition in mass and political communication. For only if we assume perception to be a passive process of registering unproblematic content are we relieved of the necessity for investigating meaning created in perception. Because of the importance of perception to the uses and gratifications program, this failure may be taken as a critical defect of the approach in its current formulation (Swanson, 1979b, 42).

Katz (1979) and Blumler (1979) both agree with Swanson and offer possible solutions to the problem. Blumler examines some social variables related to using the media for gratifications. He then begins to draw together the elements of a conceptual framework which may address this matter.

> Its point of departure would be the idea that audience members familiar with certain materials come to form perceptions of what they have to offer. These in turn become their perceived *appeals*, which may include perceptions of the *meanings and values* conveyed by the materials concerned. Translated into *expectations*, these appeals become *motives* for attending to the same material. And if confirmed in experience they become *satisfactions*, which will feed back into the complex of motives for continuing to consume them. Meanwhile, audience members' *social roles* help to shape their perceptions of such meanings and in this way also feature among the forces motivating attendance (Blumler, 1979, 32-33).

One of the problems facing uses and gratifications researchers in their attempt to overcome this problem is their fixation upon sociological variables, e.g., alienation, household size, frequency of visiting relatives, number of clubs to which one belongs, etc.(Blumler, 1979). It might be more

useful to utilize a psychological theory which focuses upon the choices which people make when they approach the media. It would appear that the uses and gratifications perspective with its emphasis upon audience members as active decision makers is most closely related to cognitive social psychology.

Wrightsman (1972, 1978, 1978) and Tate (1976) have pointed out that varying assumptions of the nature of mankind underlie the various sociological and psychological theories. The linear effects model shares the view of psychological behaviorism that people are completely molded by their environment and controlled by it. Uses and gratifications researchers share the assumptions of cognitive social psychologists that people are thinking, creative persons who take the environmental and cultural input and mold it to their own perspectives to meet their own needs. One of the basic needs of human beings, according to cognitive social psychologists, is the need for symmetry, balance, or consistency in their cognitive structures. The debate in cognitive psychology in recent years has been over the exact nature of consistency (see Abelson, et. al., 1968).

One of the cognitive theories which understands people as active manipulators of their environment is Activation theory. While there are several versions of activation theory (Peak, 1968) the one focused upon in this paper will be that version developed by Donald W. Fiske and Salvatore R. Maddi (Fiske and Maddi, 1961; Maddi, 1971; Maddi, 1976). This version of activation theory is well researched and applicable to the study of mass communication.

Activation refers to that level of psychological and physiological excitement which an individual habitually seeks during waking hours. "Activation refers on the psychological side to excitement and tension, and on the

physiological side to the state of excitation in a postulated brain center" (Maddi, 1976, 667-668). Each person develops during their lifetime a level of activation which is somewhere above the minimum and below the maximum for people. This customary or characteristic level of activation fluctuates during the day in a predictable pattern. The level of activation raises quite rapidly upon rising and then gradually for much of the day. Finally it begins to recede until night. Each individual has his or her own level and pattern of activation which fluctuates in essentially the same pattern each day. The level of activation at any moment is "determined by the impact of stimulation, by which is meant the degree of intensity, meaningfulness, and variety of stimulation emanating from internal and external sources" (Maddi, 1976, 668).

Fiske and Maddi distinguish three dimensions of stimulation--variation, intensity, and meaningfulness. Variation refers to the amount of change between present stimulation and previous stimulation, novelty and unexpectedness. Intensity refers to the amount of physical energy being utilized. Meaningfulness refers to the significance and importance of the stimuli. Fiske and Maddi understand that people need variations in the intensity of their activities, the meaningfulness of their activities, and between activities. People seek out variation, different levels of intensity and meaningfulness in order to maintain the customary level of activation. People attempt to maintain the "level of activation to which one is accustomed (that is characteristic of one)" (Maddi, 1976, 165).

This is a pure consistency theory. However, instead of positing some minimal state of consistency between one's beliefs, attitudes, or values, as do all consistency theories, this theory focuses upon the individual's activities at maintaining a level of alertness, energy, and meaningfulness.

The majority of cognitive consistency theories hypothesize that people seek to reduce inconsistencies between beliefs, attitudes, values, (see Rokeach, 1973, 215-234) and the environment. Inconsistency is understood to produce a psychological tension which the individual is moved to reduce. Once experiencing this tension, the individual will act to reduce the inconsistency by attitude change, value change, perception change, or changing one's situation or environment. Balance theories, including dissonance theory, argue that all people seek a consistent state of cognitive peace which is free from tension.

Activation theory, on the other hand, states that instead of seeking to maintain a consistent state of tensionlessness people will seek out novel, new, tension producing experiences in order to raise a level of physiological and psychological tension which has fallen below the accustomed level. Therefore, that which produces psychological tension, according to activation theory, is a level of activation which has risen above or fallen below the accustomed level of activation. If the level of activation is too high the individual will experience a negative affect and act to lower the level by withdrawing or differentiating between stimuli. New experiences will be sought which lower the level of activation by relaxation, entertainment, or escape. If the level of activation is too low, thus below the customary level, the individual will seek new levels of activity to raise the activation level to its accustomed level. The customary level will fluctuate according to the time of day and life style.

The customary activation level is learned as one grows and experiences various activities in life. As the baby seeks interaction with its environment, is stimulated by it, interacts with parents at various hours of the day, the level of activation begins to develop. It is the "impact of early stimulation, not its content, that has a formative influence"(Maddi, 1976, 170).

The home environment of the child, the patterns of stimulation within that environment, the characteristic curve of activation which the child experiences, all begin to set the customary level of activation which the child will find most satisfying as an adult.

> As experience accumulates, the person learns certain habitual ways of functioning that are useful in ensuring that large discrepencies between actual and characteristic levels of activation will not occur. These ways of influencing the impact of present and future intensity, meaningfulness, and variation of stimulation from interoceptive, exteroceptive, and cortical sources form a large part of the periphal personality....The person's range of experience and activities is selected and maintained in order to yield degrees of impact at various times during the day resulting in actual levels of activation that match those which are characteristic. If anything, the longer the person lives, the more deeply entrenched will be his characteristic curve of activation (Maddi, 1976, 171).

Maddi and Fiske do not intend to argue that the curve of activation is set in childhood and static ever after. Rather they suggest that the customary curve of activation will remain roughly similar throughout one's life. However, as the individual seeks experiences or stimulation to maintain the customary level of activation, ever new experiences will be sought out because things which were meaningful at one time become ordinary as time passes. "Variation is especially short-lived, for any novel or unexpected stimulus loses so much impact after a while that it may become boring"(Maddi, 1976, 172).

> What this means is that as the person lives longer and longer, he must continually shift his anticipatory strategies for ensuring that future levels of activation will not be too low for comfort. In action, he must continually broaden his range of activities and interests. In thought and feeling, he must become more and more subtle and differentiated, for one can thereby ensure that future stimulation will actually be experienced as more impactful than it would be if experienced now....But in order to properly maintain characteristic activation, the person must also develop anticipatory strategies to ensure that future impact not be higher than characteristic level. This is especially necessary to balance off the possible, though unintended side effects of anticipatory attempts to keep activation from falling below the characteristic level.(Maddi, 1976, 172)

As one seeks to maintain a balance between actual level of activation and customary level, one must learn what will raise a level which has fallen below the customary level but not raise it significantly above the customary level of activation. Thus one develops two sets of strategies for dealing with stimuli: 1)"greater cognitive, affective, and actional differentiation" (Maddi, 1976, 172) for keeping up activation; and b) "the progressive increase in principles and techniques for integrating the elements of cognition, affect, and action differentiated in order to ensure that activation will not be too low"(Maddi, 1976, 173).

> Integrative processes permit you to see how some experience is similar in meaning and intensity to other experiences, regardless of how different it may be in terms of more concrete analysis expressive of differentiation processes. There is no conflict between the processes of differentiation and integration. No matter how sensitive you become to our Jackson Pollack painting on the basis of differentiation processes, you can also place it in the overall scheme of his work, the work of contemporaries, and the history of art, through exercise of integrative processes. Integrative processes function to ensure that activation levels experienced in the future will not be wildly high, without blanketing out the possiblity of the sensitive experiencing needed in order to avoid dismally low activation levels (Maddi, 1976, 173).

It should be clear that Fiske and Maddi do not conceive of people as being only reactive to the environment but as Allport pointed out, they are proactive(Allport, 1955). Every person develops a customary activation level by interacting with people, their environment, and their physiological levels of activity. In this active interchange with their environment they gradually develop the curve which satisfies them during the day. Some people like quite a bit of stimulation when they awake and less as the day goes on. Other people do not like too much stimulation in the morning but come to expect it in the evening. Activities are then chosen on the basis of sustaining the customary level. The individual learns what activities and

stimulation will maintain the customary level, decrease a level of activation which has risen too high, or raise the activation level when it has fallen significantly below the customary level. People will seek out those activities which they believe vary in intensity, meaningfulness, or similarity from present activities. In order to gaurd against a too great of increase in the level of activation people will become desensitized to stimuli in their environment and sensitized to other stimuli.

Maddi and Propst (1971) have extended activation theory to take into consideration of different levels of activation which are characteristic of different people. Their first distinction is between people who are high-activation and other people who are low-activation. High-activation people are those persons who like variety in their lives. They seek out a variety of activities and stimuli which will keep their activation levels from falling too low. Low activation people will spend more effort to keep their levels from rising too high. They will avoid situations which they believe will bring too much stimulation.

Since activation varies on three attibutes, e.g., intensity, meaningfulness, variety, Maddi and Probst argue that further distinctions can be made between people.

> The high- and low-activation personality types are both subdivided into three parts reflecting this distinction concerning preference for particular stimulus attributes. High-activation people who favor intensity, meaningfulness, or variety, are considered to have an approach motive for intensity, meaningfulness, or variety, respectively. Low-activation people for whom intensity, meaningfulness, or variety is most salient are considered to have an avoidance motive for intensity, meaningfulness, or variety, respectively. The terms approach and avoidance motivation are used in much the same manner as McClelland's position, with the approach motives often called needs and the avoidance motives often called fears (Maddi, 1976, 365).

Maddi and Probst (1971) further breakdown the types of activation maintaining behavior along internal/external behavior. Some people will seek stimuli external to themselves, e.g., the go-getter, to maintain their customary level of activation. Others will seek internal stimuli, e.g. the person who concentrates upon logical problems such as chess for stimulation, to maintain the customary level.

These distinctions make the following possible variations in activation behavior.

1) High activation, external, meaningfulness: seeks causes and problems in society or work organization to solve, active in politics, etc.
2) High activation, external, intensity: active in action, sports, etc.
3) High activation, external, variety: "will show curiosity, adventurousness, and impulsiveness."
4) High activation, internal, meaningfulness: responds to problems of the mind, intellectual.
5) High activation, internal, intensity: "pursues sensations and emotions," subtle, complex.
6) High activation, internal, variety: "strive for originality in some creative endeavor."
7) Low activation, external, meaningfulness: conformist, avoids ambiguity, conservative, tends to oversimplify problems.
8) Low activation, external, intensity: attempt to slow down social activities, dislikes lack of organization.
9) Low activation, external, variety: "seek to force routine on the environment, preferring the familiar to the new."
10) Low activation, internal, meaningfulness: "will show an absence of detailed or diverse thoughts and daydreams." Seeks to avoid excesses and indulgences.
11) Low activation, internal, intensity: tend to be ascetic and also seeks to avoid excesses of any kind.
12) Low activation, internal, variety: "will force self to function consistenly and stably, in a manner devoid of flamboyance." (Maddi, 1976, 668-669)

Thayer (1967) reports a semantic differential scale which measures activation levels. This scale is much easier to use in measuring activation levels than the projective measures developed by Maddi, Charlens, Maddi and Smith (1962). Thayer reports the factor analysis of the scale as follows:

general activation—lively, active, full of pep, energetic, peppy, vigorous, activated; high activation—clutched up, jittery, stirred up, fearful, intense; general deactivation—at rest, still, leisurely, quiescent, quiet, calm, placid; deactivation—sleepy, tired, drowsy. Thayer argues that these factors represent the continuum from anxious tension to sleep.

Activation theory would appear to be complimentary to the attempts at theory by uses and gratifications researchers. Both perspectives understand that people seek stimulus from the environment. Activation theory helps overcome the criticism that uses and gratifications does not stipulate why people use the media. The media are a part of the environment providing a) a variety in activities, b) information to help a person understand the world and oneself, and c) activities of various intensities. Since one seeks to maintain the activation level within the customary level, the media provide activities to allow the person to begin lowering a level which has become too high and increase a level which has become to low. Instead of simply reacting to media content, or even being manipulated by that content, activation theory and uses and gratifications research maintain that people use the media to meet their own needs.

Uses and gratifications research delineates several reasons for paying attention to the media: surveillance, diversion, personal identity reasons such as reinforcement, guidance, etc. Persons who have a high need for meaningfulness, as well as all persons with a need for meaning, will chose those media which give information about the world and themselves. Diversion is related to using the media for variation in activity and a change of intensity.

Activation theory would also lend support to the avoidance of media content by those persons with low activation, internal, behaviors. Both

Blumler and McQuail (1969) and Becker (1979) report finding persons who avoid political advertisements because a) they have their mind already made up, b) they prefer to relax, c) they find nothing new in the advertisements, d) they are not interested, or e) they find them hard to understand. Avoidance of media content is as logical a behavior according to activation theory as is the use of media content to fulfill need gratification.

One of the best illustrations of the use of media, in this case television, to lower an activation level which has risen too high is provided by Greenberg (1974). Greenberg found that some children used television to get away from the rest of the family, . . . After one has an argument with a parent and is really disturbed or upset, television can be a calming influence. It also keeps other people from talking to you since they can see that one is involved with television. Similarly Greenberg reports that children watch television for relaxation, companionship, to pass the time, as a habit, and for arousal. Tate (1976) reports similar reasons among adults for viewing television. Television is used by some for relaxation. Others use television because it is an enjoyable habit which is a part of their daily routine. In other words, television is utilized by these people as a regular behavior for enjoyment, maintance of their customary activation level.

Activation theory allows one to hypothesize that people will use the media in differentiating ways. Sometimes they will come to television for relaxation, diversion, entertainment. If they have a need for a more meaningful activity they may choose a documentary, or turn to a magazine, book, or newspaper. If they have been working at something monotonous, television provides variety of content. Tate (1976) found that housewifes reported

viewing soap operas because they offered a period of rest and a break from the monotonous chores of the household. Thus television is used to bring variety into the daily activities. It is also a behavior with a lower level of intensity since one can sit down and watch after being on one's feet all day.

If a person has developed meaning for the use of books, e.g., a novel or mystery story, during their childhood and adolescence, then it is predicted that these persons will seek out those activities which experience has taught them bring relaxation. Since they are print oriented, television will not fulfill the need to raise or lower their activation level. Experience has taught them that the degree of relaxation received from a good novel is more lasting than the amount of relaxation received from watching television. Research (Tate, 1976) indicates that the higher one's educational level the less television they watch. Since university education is print oriented this effect is found in the research.

At other times a person may be seeking information in order to fulfill the need for a more meaningful activity. A documentary program on television may well fulfill the need of one individual while another will seek the detail which only a book can provide. Which medium will be sought by the individual will depend upon a) past experience with the media, and b) the intensity of the need for meaningfulness.

Previous theories linking television viewing with aggressive behavior and catharsis are, in the view of this author, too limited and simplistic. They are essentially either/or theories. Either television viewing reduces aggressive tendencies or television viewing increases aggression. It is precisely this oversimplification of human behavior that proponents of the uses and gratifications perspective object to in media research.

Activation theory and the uses and gratifications perspective allow one to differentiate effects of viewing television. First, the past experience the individual has with the medium is important. Secondly, the use one is making of the medium is equally as important upon effect. Television may be used to raise a level of activation which has fallen too low even making the person more aggressive because of a need for intense activity. It will also be used for relaxation, or diversion, to lower a level which may have risen to aggressive levels.

Tate (1967) measured the activation levels of persons before and after viewing a television program. After viewing S.W.A.T., a U. S. police show, respondents generally reported being more relaxed and friendly towards other people. Similarly after viewing the soap opera, Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman, respondents showed significantly lower levels of alertness and tenseness. This data is being examined further to investigate the linkage between stated gratification sought and activation level.

In summary the following statements are given as a few of the possible linkages between activation theory and the uses and gratifications model.

1) The media are used in maintaining customary levels of activation. Media are only several of many stimuli which people utilize in this manner.

2) Patterns of utilization are developed as one comes into contact with the media as a child and gradually learns what the media can do in helping to maintain the customary level of activation. Therefore, gratifications sought from media usage will change as the individual matures, seeks variety, and differentiates between media and desired gratification.

3) The constant utilization of one specific medium will lead to the need for variation in content and media usage. For example, after a viewer has watched detective programs on television for several years, the viewer will experience a need for new types of programming or novel twists in plot construction. Thus a new type of programming will first be sought for variety, and/or meaningfulness, and secondly, for relaxation and/or excitement. This new type of programming will eventually become boring and a new media diet will be sought.

5) Different media will be sought for different reasons given the past experience of the viewer with each medium.

5a) Some media will be used for meaningfulness, others for variety, and still for intensity.

5b) Within a medium various types of content will be utilized for different reasons to maintain or restore the activation level. Again it is predicted that content will be differentiated by its usefulness to provide either meaning, variety, or intensity.

6) Individuals who can be characterized as high activation, external, meaningfulness persons will utilize civic or political activities, social activities, and little media to maintain their activation levels.

7) Persons with high activation, external, intensity needs will be active in sports, running, etc. and utilize few media to maintain their activation levels. They may well characterize reading and television viewing as a waste of time except when sports are being featured.

8) High activation, external, variety persons will utilize a wide range of media to maintain their activation level. Persons with low activation, external, variety needs will use few media and probably tend to view only nonthreatening television content.

9) Persons with high activation, internal, meaningfulness patterns will utilize more print media. They will probably deplore the inanity of television. Individuals with low activation, internal, meaningfulness patterns will probably enjoy television and avoid print media.

10) Low activation, external, meaningfulness individuals will not like new forms of media content, avoid information programming, and seek media content which reinforces their established beliefs.

Many more hypotheses could be developed utilizing activation theory and the uses and gratifications perspective. This paper has attempted a preliminary exploration of the possibilities which develop when one links these two theories. Uses and gratifications theory needs a firm rooting in human behavior. Activation theory provides a rationale for use of the media. It also provides insight into the information gathering behavior of people. Measuring scales exist for the measurement of activation levels. These scales also provide an operationalization for the gratifications sought from the media. For example, if a person watches television for relaxation, are they more relaxed after engaging in television viewing? Thayer's self-report scales can be utilized, along with physiological measures, to assess the degree to which the individual is more relaxed after viewing television. Uses and gratifications research in the future would be strengthened with some consideration of activation as the source of media usage.

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